

# Spirit of New West in Denver's Civic Center

By LILLIE GILLILAND McDOWELL

A RECENT movement in a southern city, looking toward the planting of trees on its streets in honor of the great writers of the South, attracted widespread attention. Denver's Colonnade of Civic Benefactors, as evidenced by its name, will honor Denver citizenry, thus it is a hall of fame unique and distinctive. The names of all Denver citizens, living or dead, who have helped substantially toward the beautification or cultural development of the city, are to be carved upon its columns. The board which will determine the names to be thus inscribed is composed of Denver citizens. The colonnade, which with the theater forms the arc of a circle, is appropriately built of Colorado gray sandstone, in keeping with the other buildings which make up the Center.

The outstanding feature of the Greek theater, which is a community theater, all its entertainments being free to the public, is the big glass curtain which is lowered at the back of the stage when the theater is in use. This curtain permits the audience to look through the stage upon the street at its rear, and also serves as a sound deflector. Thus the acoustic properties of the stage are unexcelled. When not in use the curtain is raised by machinery into archways of the colonnade, the machinery operating from a basement room. This arch is copied after the proscenium arch in Denver's great auditorium, making the structure of the colonnade the most unique in the country.

Denver's Civic Center is a part of a great plan originated by Mayor Robert W. Speer, now deceased, who was one of the foremost authorities on municipal government in the world. The plan embraced the improvement and extension of parks, boulevards and playgrounds and the building of the Civic Center, the latter to form the nucleus of the whole park and boulevard system. It was so planned as to supplement and connect the work already carried out; and was so far-reaching in its scope as to make the need for further acquisition of lands unlikely in this present generation.

When the Civic Center project was launched, Denver had 29 parks, with a total acreage of 1,984. The city now has 37 parks, including 18 supervised children's playgrounds. There are 18 miles of improved parkways.

The Civic Center plans embrace the aggregation of public buildings in a central location. The state capitol building formed the logical nucleus for this. Its site, on the brow of Capitol Hill, commands an unexcelled view of the Rockies. It is built entirely of Colorado granite, at a cost of \$2,800,000, and is flanked on the south by a handsome state museum building. Its grounds are beautiful, with trees and statuary, the latter embodying the spirit of the West. Four blocks immediately flanking these grounds on the west are converted into a plaza, which, with its buildings, forms the Civic Center.

The most commendable feature of the Civic Center project is perhaps the caution and slowness with

which it has been pushed forward since its inception more than 15 years ago. Mayor Speer, after the project was well on foot, took advantage of a brief period during which the commission form of government prevailed in Denver, thus deposing him as mayor, and visited some of the great cities of Europe and other countries, making a careful study of their plazas and civic centers. He noted that some of these had taken thousands of years for their completion from the time of their inception, and resolved to emulate in a degree this example in so far as practicable in a bustling, hustling city of the West, and although several cities of the United States have already pushed the construction of civic centers to completion, Denver refuses to be shaken from her conservative attitude.

Many features are yet in the embryonic stage, no designs having been adopted. Among these are a fountain to be placed in the southern extension of the Center to correspond in general outline with the Pioneer Monument, which occupies a projecting triangle on the north, and two statues, illustrative of the spirit

the art commission, and the commission passed favorably upon it. The following year an independent commission was appointed which included a dozen prominent citizens. A thing that greatly favored the project at this time was the fact that all the lands to be included in the Civic Center were located in the East Denver Park District, which district, the oldest and richest in the city, had up to this time acquired all its parks largely through donations and without special assessment upon its taxpayers.

But perhaps the greatest factor in the success of the plan was the organization of a Civic Center Association. It was a sort of information bureau in connection with the projected movement in the east district, and slowly but surely educated the public to the benefits of the plan. Incidentally Denver received much free and widespread advertising through this work of its citizens.

The Court of Honor, the outstanding feature of the whole project, was the conception of Mayor Speer. So stimulating to civic pride did it prove, that since the announcement was made Denver has received from her citizens gifts of archways, art collections, fountains and the like, approximating \$400,000 in value. The Vorheis

Memorial archway, now in course of construction, and to be erected at a cost of \$125,000, was the gift of Mr. J. H. P. Voorheis, an early pioneer of Denver, who left his entire fortune to the project. It will form a beautiful and fitting addition to the center, its plans including a waterscape, pylons and statuary.

It is planned that further improvements on the Civic Center will be made in so far as practicable without cost to the taxpayer. The Colonnade of Civic Benefactors, dedicated last year at a cost of \$185,163, was erected by funds derived from an annual income paid by the telephone company for street improvements. Statues on the state house grounds are the gifts of private citizens. Other contemplated monuments will be paid for by the city from some special fund.

The smaller decorative features of the Center are noteworthy. Among these are: The two beautiful pictures on either inner side of the archway of the colonnade (these are "The Trapper" and "The Prospector" by Allen True); the sunken gardens immediately in front of the theater; the formal lawn lying between the library and the projected art building, the decorative detail of this lawn consisting of pylons and ornamental lighting fixtures, the whole flanked by a low railing of Grecian design.

That Denver appreciates and makes use of the advantages offered it through the Center is proven by crowds which attend its semi-weekly band concerts, the auditorium which seats 5,000 always being comfortably filled. The theater was completed during 1919 and the city celebrated its first community Christmas there when immense crowds gathered each evening during the pre-Christmas week.



Crowd at one of the semi-weekly band concerts, Denver Civic Center.

of the West, which will be placed in the Central Plaza. This plaza will appropriately be known as the Plaza of the Past.

The history of how Denver has carried this immense project to its present stage is most interesting and sets an object lesson in civic pride which other cities may well emulate. The plan as first proposed by Mayor Speer in 1904 was opposed bitterly by a group of taxpayers, so that at the close of his second term in 1912, only the land had been acquired. This, however, was a long step forward, as the land alone cost the city \$1,500,000. The city then secured the services of an expert, Charles Mulford Robinson. The Robinson Civic Center plan was presented to the voters January, 1906, but met with defeat because of the heavy expense involved. During this same year, MacMonies, the sculptor, visited Denver to make a study of his Pioneer Monument, now a part of the Center. He suggested the present site and plan of the Center to

## Why and Because

that he was friendly, he extended his right hand, which would be clasped by the other's right hand, if he, too, meant peace. Thus each would be sure that the other would not draw his sword.

*Why is the fourth hour marked IIII on clock and watch dials, instead of IV?*

Because, when the first clock, resembling those in use today, was made by Henry Vick in 1370, for Charles the V, of France, surnamed the Wise, the king found fault with the Roman numeral IV. He said it should be IIII. Vick ventured to suggest that the king was mistaken, whereupon Charles roared: "I am never wrong! Take the clock away and correct the mistake at once on pain of my displeasure." The figure was altered to IIII and has so remained ever since.

*Why is it customary to mount a horse from the left side?*

Because, in the days when a sword was an essential part of a man's dress, and hung at the left side, mounting from the right side would have necessitated taking hold of the scabbard and placing it over the saddle with the hand needed to assist in mounting. By mounting from the left side the sword hung clear and allowed easier action.

*Why is a man called a "bridegroom" at his wedding?*

Because in primitive days, the newly wedded man had to wait upon the bride and serve at her table upon his wedding day, and thus was a "groom" on this occasion.

*Why is Ireland called the Emerald Isle?*

Because of the richness of its verdure, the term being first used by Dr. William Drennan, the author of "Glendaloch," and other poems, published in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

*Why do soldiers fire a volley over the grave of a dead comrade?*

Because in days gone by, when superstition was practically universal, it was generally believed that making a noise kept away evil spirits, and the passing bell came into vogue for that reason. When firearms were invented, volley firing was substituted for the passing bell, the belief being that the sound of battle would be more efficacious in the case of a soldier.

*Why do we speak of giving a person the "cold shoulder"?*

Because of the custom once prevalent in France of serving to a guest who had overstayed his or her welcome a cold shoulder of mutton instead of a hot roast, as a hint for them to go.

*Why do we speak of the "near" and "off" horse?*

Because in the days when the driver walked beside the horses his position was always at the left, with his right next to the team. Therefore, in driving a pair, the horse on the left was nearer than the one on the right. The "near" horse is always the one on the left.

*Why is the rabbit or hare associated with Easter and Easter eggs?*

Because in Europe as well as Asiatic countries the hare has been from ancient times the symbol for the moon, and the movable feast of Easter is governed by the lunar orb. The moon is the "open-eyed watcher of the night," and the hare is a nocturnal animal. The young of the hare are born with their eyes open and are said never to close them. In many parts of Germany the children firmly believe the myth that the hare lays the Easter egg, and the association of the moon, Easter rabbits, and Easter eggs is everywhere the same, with its symbolism of spring and the awakening of life.

*Why is the cross placed on Good Friday buns?*

Because the Good Friday bun is associated with the ancient "bann" which was an offering of cake, or sweetbread, to the gods. Cereops is supposed to have introduced this bread which bore the marks of two horns. The Greeks are believed to have substituted a cross later, apparently for the easier division of the round bun into four equal parts. Maitland, in his account of London, 1739, ascribes the cross to the bakers, who, perceiving the great profit that arose to the clergy from the use of the symbol, adopted it for their buns.

*Why do we always shake hands with the right hand?*

Because in the days when people were not as peaceable as they are now, every man carried a sword or dagger to defend himself. This sword was worn on his left side, where the right hand could quickly grasp it for use in time of peril. When a man wished to show